



# NEWS RELEASE



Department of the Interior • U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service • 64 Maple Street • Burbank, Washington 99323 • (509) 546-8300

Date:

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## **AERIAL SPRAYING OF HERBICIDES SADDLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (HANFORD REACH NATIONAL MONUMENT)**

Aerial weed spraying will take place on a portion of the Saddle National Wildlife Refuge portion of the Hanford Reach National Monument north and west of the Highway 243/240 intersection in Grant County, Washington, from December 4-16, 2008.

In July, 2008, a wildfire in this area burned approximately 1,100 acres on the Refuge before it was contained. The entire habitat that burned was shrub-steppe, a habitat that is rapidly disappearing in the Columbia Basin.

Immediately after the fires, a Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER, pronounced “bear”) Plan was developed to address short- and long-term rehabilitation needs. The plan developed by Refuge biologists included aerial spraying for weed control, seeding native species, and hand-planting native shrubs.

The aerial spraying will be conducted on approximately 1,100 acres located north of Highway 243 and west of the L-SW Road. The spraying is being done to control invasive annual grasses, such as cheatgrass, prior to planting native grasses on the burned area. Aerial spraying operations will strictly adhere to established buffer zones around water resources and private lands, where chemicals will not be used. Chemical applications will only be made during periods with light wind and moderate temperatures and when no inversion layers are present. The actual spraying should only take 2-3 days if weather conditions are right.

Further information can be obtained by calling the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex headquarters at (509) 546-8300.

While the ecological structure and function of the burned areas cannot be restored in a short period of time, these efforts jumpstart the recovery of ecological processes and habitat quality. Shrub-steppe is one of the slowest habitats to recover naturally, and, without intervention, could take decades or longer to fully recover. Quickly halting the establishment and spread of invasive plants, and promoting native species establishment, will not only benefit native plants and animals, but will help prevent the area from being further damaged by future fires.

**– FWS –**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The FWS manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges—including two national monuments—thousands of wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 66 fishery resources offices, and more than 80 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid Program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.